

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3871

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 12198

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IN

SUBJECT: KASHMIR

REF: A. STATE 199185 B. NEW DELHI 9908

SUMMARY: OWING TO ILLNESS AND OTHER DELAYS, THE KASHMIR NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN EMISSARIES OF SHEIKH ABDULLAH AND MRS. GANDHI HAVE SLOWED SINCE WE LAST REPORTED. THE PROCESS IS COMPLEX BECAUSE BOTH SIDES ARE TRYING TO BUILD SUPPORT AMONG THEIR RESPECTIVE CONSITUENCIES, ELEMENTS OF WHICH ARE HARD-LINEERS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME NEGOTIATING WITH EACH OTHER. THEY STILL SOUND OPTIMISTIC, BUT IT SEEMS SOMEWHAT LESS LIKELY NOW THAT THEY WILL REACH AGREEMENT NEXT MONTH. IF AGREEMENT IS REACHED THE CHINESE MAY RESPOND MORE VIGOROUSLY THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN ANTICIPATED SOME
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MONTHS AGO, END SUMMARY.

1. THE PACE OF NEGOTIATIONS: THE ILLNESS OF SHEIKH ABDULLAH'S REPRESENTATIVE, MIRZA AFZAL BEG, RESULTED IN A SUSPENSION OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IN EARLY AUGUST. THE PRIME MINISTER'S EMISSARY, G. PARTHASARATHY, WAS IN SRINAGAR FOR THREE DAYS IN LATE AUGUST, BUT THE MEETINGS WERE DESCRIBED AS DEALING WITH "STRAY ISSUES" RATHER THAN AS "BUSINESS SESSIONS." D.P. DHAR, MINISTER OF PLANNING AND HIMSELF A KASHMIRI POLITICIAN, ALSO SAW BEG IN LATE AUGUST. MRS. GANDHI MET WITH PARTHASARATHY, THE CHIEF MINISTER, THE GOVERNOR, THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND HER SECRETARY AUGUST 28 TO DEVELOP A GOI POSITION. THE NEXT ROUND OF FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN BEG AND PARTHASARATHY, SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 9, HAS NOW BEEN POSTPONED TWICE WITH NO REASON GIVEN.

2. THE SUBSTANCE: THE POSITIONS OF THE TWO SIDES AND THE ISSUES BETWEEN THEM STILL APPEAR AS DESCRIBED IN THE REFTEL. BOTH SIDES HAVE SOUGHT SUPPORT FOR AN AGREEMENT FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE CONSTITITUENCES. IN DOING SO, THEY HAVE DESCRIBED THEIR POSITIONS IN TERMS WHICH ON THE SURFACE WOULD INDICATE LITTLE CHANCE OF AGREEMENT. SEPARATELY, HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN HINTS OF WILLINGNESS OF ONE OR THE OTHER TO ACCEPT A COMPROMISE ON A GIVEN ISSUE. THE ISSUE OF ELECTIONS PROVIDES AN EXAMPLE. THE SHEIKH PUBLICLY CALLS FOR NEW ELECTIONS. THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT INDICATED AFTER THE AUGUST 28 STRATEGY SESSION THAT THERE IS LITTLE POSSIBILITY OF THIS. THE SHEIKH, HOWEVER, AT ONE POINT MENTIONED THAT HE MIGHT ACCEPT AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT PENDING NEW ELECTIONS, AND THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT APPEARS INTERESTED IN THE POSSIBILITY OF RESOLVING THE PROBLEM BY ADVANCING THE STATE ELECTIONS FROM 1977 TO HAVE THEM COINCIDE WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN EARLY 1976. PRESUMABLY IF THEY CAN COMPROMISE ON THE INDIVIDUAL ISSUES, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO PAPER OVER THEIR DISAGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE OVER WHETHER THE STATE CAN RETURN TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF 1953. PUBLICLY, SHEIKH ABDULLAH CONTINUES TO INSIST ON THIS, WHILE INDIA DENIES IT AS A POSSIBILITY. (INDIA DRAWS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN SIKKIM, A PROTECTORATE WHICH HAS BECOME AN ASSOCIATE STATE, AND KASHMIR, WHICH FORMALLY ACCEDED TO INDIA IN 1974. IT DENIES THAT KASHMIR CAN ASPIRE TO THE STATUS OF SIKKIM, EVEN THOUGH KASHMIR INITIALLY ACCEDED ONLY ON THE SPECIFIC SUBJECTS OF DEFENSE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS.)

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3. THE OUTLOOK: BOTH SIDES CONTINUE TO SAY THAT THEY ARE NOT PESSIMISTIC AND TO DENY THAT ANY HITCH HAS DEVELOPED, BUT THEY SEEM SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVE. EVEN SO, THE BEG-PARTHASARATHY NEGOTIATIONS ONLY CONCERN THE "CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES." ONCE THEY CONCLUDE, SHEIKH ABDULLAH IS TO TAKE UP "POLITICAL ISSUES" (INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF NEW ELECTIONS) WITH EITHER MRS. GANDHI OR SWARAN SINGH. WE FRANKLY DON'T SEE HOW THEY ARE GOING TO WRAP

UP THAT SECOND SET OF TALKS IN A MATTER OF A FEW WEEKS. A PARTIAL AGREEMENT, ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, MAY BE ACHIEVED BY THE DEADLINE OF LATE SEPTEMBER OR EARLY OCTOBER SET BY SHEIKH ABDULLAH FOR CONCLUSION OF THE ENTIRE PROCESS, BUT A COMPLETE AGREEMENT WILL PROBABLY TAKE LONGER.

4. FOREIGN REACTION: AS ISLAMABAD HAS ALREADY MADE CLEAR, PAKISTAN CAN BE EXPECTED TO TAKE STRENUOUS EXCEPTION TO ANY INDIAN AGREEMENT ON KASHMIR. CHINA MAY ALSO JOIN INTO THE CHORUS. A FOREIGN MINISTRY CHINA EXPERT TOLD US SEPTEMBER 12 THAT INDIA HAD SEEN NO RECENT CHINESE COMMENTARY ON KASHMIR, ALTHOUGH CHINA HAD PLAYED BACK SOME PAKISTANI COMMENTS. CHINA HAS, HOWEVER, REACTED SHARPLY TO THE CHANGE IN THE STATUS OF SIKKIM, SUGGESTING AMONG OTHER THINGS THAT THE INDIAN ACTION HAS MADE INDIA'S NEIGHBORS FEEL INSECURE. IF INDIA REACHES AN AGREEMENT WITH SHEIKH ABDULLAH, CHINA MAY FURTHER CRITICIZE INDIA, IN SUPPORT OF THE PAKISTANI REACTION.
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